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ABSTRACT

The role of the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) in encouraging research through the programs and activities of the member schools is discussed. It is suggested that the dean or administrative head of a college of nursing is in a position to influence nursing research activities. The principal role of the academic dean in promoting nursing research is to provide a strong research environment, principally through recruiting, maintaining, and sustaining faculty with the potential for scholarly activity. Specific attention is directed to the following ways in which the dean can promote nursing research activities: (1) development of faculty research skills and improvement of research productivity; (2) promotion of high quality teaching of research in the nursing curricula at both the undergraduate and graduate level; (3) improvement of personal grantsmanship skills as well as those of senior faculty; (4) promotion of understanding of and support for nursing research; (5) sustained communication and collaboration with professional groups and individuals promoting nursing research or conducting multidisciplinary research in which nursing participates; and (6) communication of nursing research findings. Three organizational goals of the AACN are to: include research-based presentations in AACN programs, communicate to the membership about research, and promote research information exchange; plan programs to provide deans with competencies in politics, ethics, finances, faculty development, content, and strategies of administration; and institutionalize the network concept by establishing liaison between those groups concerned with research from regional and national nursing organizations. A list of research project categories is appended. (SW)

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Position Statement

Nursing Research

Position Statement

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Nursing Research

Position Statement

Assumptions

Six assumptions underlie AACN's commitment to research conducted and supported primarily through the programs and activities of the member schools.

- Facilitation of inquiry is a legitimate expectation among colleagues in any scholarly discipline.
- Nursing must encourage and support the search for knowledge to help meet the public's health needs and expectations.
- The goal of nursing research is to provide systematically-derived knowledge that contributes to the solution of health problems.
- The capacity to build and enhance a research climate differs from institution to institution. It is situation specific and depends upon institutional values, goals, and structures.
- Strong graduate programs must be based on clinical excellence, faculty scholarship, research mentorship, and communication among investigators.
- Fulfillment of research goals requires appropriate intellectual and material resources in the proper proportion.

Introduction

The American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) has explicitly stated that, in serving the public interest, it exists to improve the practice of professional nursing through advancing the quality of baccalaureate and graduate programs, promoting research, and developing academic leaders. While interest in nursing research has been expressed by the organization since its inception, as nursing education has moved further into the mainstream of higher education and academia, scholarly activities of nursing faculty have become increasingly competitive and sophisticated. This has brought about a need for a fuller statement of the AACN's role in encouraging research.

In 1978 the National Academy of Sciences published a historic section on the nature of nursing research, setting forth its legitimacy as a field of inquiry. The Committee on a Study of National Needs for Biomedical and Behavioral Research Personnel defined nursing research as follows:

> Nursing research focuses on the role of nursing care in the prevention of illness, care of the sick, and the promotion and restoration of health. Although it relies upon and utilizes the substantive scientific information and methodology provided by the other biological and behavioral sciences, it differs from those other scientific areas in that it focuses on their relevance to nursing rather than other aspects of health care.

Over the last 25 years the quality of nursing research has steadily improved, earning acknowledgment and appreciation by patients, clients, and health science colleagues. Gortner *et al.* have identified eight categories of nursing research in the U.S.A. over this period: the science of practice, the artistry of practice (clinical therapeutics), structures for optimal delivery of care, development of tools and methods, historical studies, nursing education, the nursing profession, and basic sciences. Rosella Schlotfeldt has outlined successful strategies that have been useful to the nursing faculty in developing a proper climate for nursing research. Nurse researchers and other nursing faculty now prepare students to investigate important nursing and health-related subjects in a manner similar to that used by other health professions: medicine, dentistry, public health, and pharmacy. Further, multidisciplinary research provides the nurse scholar with the opportunity to collaborate and jointly publish research findings.

The American Association of Colleges of Nursing acknowledges the need to communicate its investment in nursing research. Even in a decade which will be marked by competing needs for scarce resources, the members view nursing research as a priority. The dean or administrative head of a college of nursing is in a position to influence nursing research activities. Academic nursing deans accept a general responsibility for nurturing the individuality and professional identity of nursing and for contributing to nursing's progress toward scientific maturity through increasing the quality and range of the scientific substructure of nursing. Specifically, academic deans recognize the need to make nursing a mature discipline based on scientific investigation and learning, whose strength derives from the coordinated efforts of its many parts.

Adopting or not adopting an attitude that research is a integral part of nursing influences the extent of research activities in which a school engages. Thus, most schools of nursing have made significant and important steps toward the development of healthy research attitudes at an early educational level by adopting in the undergraduate program a curriculum requirement for a basic level of research knowledge.

Research, as an integral part of graduate study, includes the learning of research skills as a requirement for the degree. Most often objectives of the program are to develop research knowledge and skills essential to understand how investigative studies are conducted, to participate in research programs, and to begin to utilize research findings. These objectives are translated into a program of study where a proportion of the required credits for the master's degree are allocated to research activities including courses in research methodologies and data analysis. Also included are discussions of the practical strategies for conducting research in naturalistic settings, whether they be clinical or educational, and the ways in which individual graduates can carve out a research commitment in their subsequent careers.

Throughout the carefully articulated sequence of nursing education, the process of investigating, learning, and teaching goes forward continuously, though with different emphases on the the variety of issues addressed.

Role of Dean in Promoting Research

This paper proposes that the principal role of the academic dean in promoting nursing research is to provide a strong research environment, principally through recruiting, maintaining, and sustaining faculty with the potential for scholarly activity. The dean's role is implemented through faculty development and through the identification and use of resources (personnel, equipment, space, time, supplies, reputation, money) congruent with the purposes and vision of the school and the university.

The dean or administrative head of a department, school, or college of nursing is in a position to promote nursing research activities in several ways:

1) development of faculty research skills and improvement of research productivity;

2) promotion of high quality teaching of research in the nursing curricula at both the undergraduate and graduate level;

3) improvement of personal grantsmanship skills as well as those of senior faculty;

4) promotion of understanding of and support for nursing research;

5) sustained communication and collaboration with professional groups and individuals promoting nursing research or conducting multidisciplinary research in which nursing participates;

6) communication of nursing research findings.

Development of Faculty Research Skills/Improvement of Research Productivity

Some aspects of the dean's role in the development of nursing faculty research skills are *scholarly*: sharing and applying findings, replicating studies, critiquing and collaborating in research and intraprofessional consultations.

Some aspects of the role are *administrative*: facilitating and funding studies, recruiting qualified and credentialing faculty, developing research competencies in faculty.

Some aspects of the role are *personal*: leading and supporting faculty's research efforts; valuing, protecting, and promoting the research ethos and collegial relationships; and upholding standards of excellence.

Some aspects of the role are *professional*: development of inter- and intraprofessional linkages and support systems among persons, departments, organizations, and institutions.

The dean communicates to faculty a value for research and encourages continued growth in research competencies through:

a) joint exploration of methods to combine research and teaching roles;

b) communication of the view that clinical teaching provides an opportunity to test hypotheses;

c) promotion of congruence between teaching, clinical, and research roles through relevant assignments; flexible but disciplined use of time; and a choice of research appropriate to classroom, community, or clinical settings.

Since scholarly activities lead to professional advancement (promotion/tenure), research is a mutual objective of faculty and administration. The faculty member may present researchable ideas, plans, or proposals to the dean for consideration. Such interaction and discussion can facilitate the research process through careful examination of needed opportunities and resources. The dean can contribute to research productivity through short- and long-term planning, strategies for collaboration and consultation, and modification of schedules. In some cases such joint planning requires development of research skills, matriculation, or further credentialing of the faculty member. The dean supports plans for doctoral and postdoctoral education for nursing faculty and participates in developing equitable, realistic, long-term goals. Such planning promotes research while attending responsibly to institutional commitments to students and clients.

Promotion of High Quality Teaching of Research

For nursing to attain maturity as a scholarly discipline, it has to insist on research-oriented and data-based nursing curricula. This is not only a requirement for mature practice, but it is also necessary for normalization of the research function as a legitimate activity for faculty, graduate students, and undergraduate students working with faculty investigators. Profound changes in the models of delivery of health care and in the types and complexity of problems presented, as well as an expanding medical and health technology require emphasis on four areas:

1) clarification of the conceptual bases of nursing care techniques;
2) evaluation of clinical nursing practices, nursing roles and nursing systems, nurse and patient activities, and support/care systems;
3) consideration of what difference nursing care makes;
4) extension of the range and power of nursing research.

The dean assures the environment and resources for research which have clinical relevance for nursing practice and which increase the quality, range, and power of the scientific explanation of clinical practices. Further, the dean attempts to recruit faculty who are engaged in their own research and who project a climate which indicates that research is an exciting and valuable professional activity.

Improvement of Grantsmanship Skills

Improvement of grantsmanship skills is ongoing through programs, workshops, conferences, seminars, consultations, and information exchange about legislative support for nursing research. Deans should be aware of all institutional facilities and resources, including institutional monies available to faculty for beginning or pilot research efforts. This information should be made easily available to faculty. Resources outside the institution should be identified and sought after by the dean and by faculty. The dean can assist faculty in obtaining research support through providing adequate research facilities; a faculty structure that facilitates communication among investigators; recognition and reward for research and

scholarship endeavors; recruitment of faculty qualified for research; and investment of energy and initiative to make nursing research a priority.

Promotion of Understanding of and Support for Nursing Research

Perhaps the greatest present needs are to promote others' comprehension of the meaning and worth of nursing research and the ends to be achieved; and to inspire in others confidence in nurses' abilities as researchers. Only with such understanding will nursing's funding base for research become equal to support provided others in the institution from intramural sources, government, foundations, regional planning boards, and other sources.

Sustained Communication/Collaboration with Groups or Individuals

Presently, deans sustain communication and collaboration in the following ways:

1) direct involvement in legislation, including provision of legislative testimony on the value of nursing research;

2) active encouragement of students and rewards to faculty who value research, who do research, and who base nursing intervention on scientific research;

3) establishment of support systems for research and research training through work in professional groups, societies and organizations, peer review, consultation, and scholarly publications;

4) provision of a model as an active, involved researcher scholar.

Communication of Nursing Research Findings

Facilitation of the communication of research efforts and their application is another important role for members of AACN. Role functions include encouraging faculty and fellow deans to share findings through presentations, seminar participation, manuscripts, and books. The dean can provide resources to assist faculty in preparing materials and encourage faculty to attend workshops and seminars which focus on research presentations, writing skills, and publication strategies.

Another important function of the dean is establishment of a mechanism for faculty to share research progress and findings with students, colleagues, and interested others. Bringing outstanding researchers in touch with faculty to encourage sharing and stimulation of ideas is an additional mechanism for facilitating communication.

Role of AACN in Promoting Research

AACN supports research development in both tangible and intangible ways. As educators, AACN members acknowledge the importance of ideas and scientific inquiry, and the value of academic freedom in educational settings. AACN members, usually chief academic officers in colleges and schools of nursing, create and maintain an atmosphere conducive to growth and change. In such an environment, teachers, researchers, and care-givers can collaborate most effectively.

AACN will work to improve the research environment in all schools of nursing and expand acceptance of the concept of "resources" for research to include faculty and staff, space, time, equipment, money, reputation, and additional doctorally-prepared faculty engaged in their own research.

AACN can contribute by providing opportunities for nursing research to be made visible in academic and professional settings. It is essential to utilize all forms of the media to highlight ongoing efforts, while also reporting research results. Distribution of findings to state and national publications, professional societies, and interprofessional organizations is highly desirable.

Three organizational goals are to:

1) Include research-based presentations in AACN programs, communicate to the membership about research, and promote research information exchange.

2) Plan programs to provide deans with competencies in politics, ethics, finances, faculty development, content, and strategies of administration.

3) Institutionalize the network concept by establishing liaison between those groups concerned with research from regional and national nursing organizations. In this way, teams of persons having different skills and backgrounds would collaborate to identify and respond to legislative issues, assure widespread dissemination of information, and provide support and protection for purposeful risk-taking. Thus, by acting as a unified group to obtain support for research and research training, political power could be exercised most effectively.

Appendix

Research Project Categories*

1. *Science of Practice*

Systematic identification of various characteristics, health problems, and health needs of patients and potential patients, individuals, and groups, as well as aspects of relationships between nurses and patients. Included in this category are those studies that are concerned with differences in health needs and health problems among individuals in different groups, for instance, those of certain cultural and ethnic backgrounds, socioeconomic levels, age groups, and illness, designed to develop theory. Findings from these types of studies will enable us to understand better the health problems and health behavior of people and of the health-care providers.

2. *Artistry of Practice (Clinical Therapeutics)*

Laboratory and field studies to evaluate nursing procedures, tech-

*Based on Gortner, Susan R., Doris Bloch, and Thomas P. Phillips, "Contribution of Nursing Research to Patient Care," *Journal of Nursing Administration*, Vol. 6, No. 3, March-April 1976, pp. 22-28.

niques, and methods. Focus is on what nurses do. Design is usually experimental; studies deal with clearly specified interventions and evaluate them in terms of outcomes—linking process and outcome.

A. *Technical or Physical Procedures*

B. *Verbal, Cognitive, Psychosocial, Interpersonal Procedures*

3. Structures for Optimal Delivery of Care

Studies deal with the physical and social environment in which nurses and clients interact (isolation of the dying; acceptance of the hospice concept); studies in which different patterns of health-care providers are evaluated; relationship of costs to efficiency (i.e., the all professional nursing staff).

4. *Development of Tools and Methods*

5. *Historical Studies*

6. *Nursing Education (System, Faculty, Students)*

7. *Nursing Profession*

8. *Basic Sciences*

Studies in the biological and social sciences that aim to discover facts about the functioning of the human body, mind, social and cultural system, etc., without clearly visible direct applicability to nursing practice, education, or administration.

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